

Commercial Websites Evaluation

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Abstract

The paper presented roughly consists of three parts, as follows:

Finding a criteria to evaluate a commercial website

Selecting a website and applying criteria

Comments and improvement advice

First task was to find suitable criteria by which the site is to be evaluated; through extensive research on the internet regarding web site criteria and business sites in general we have found out what makes the business web such a powerful medium for approaching your customers. The availability and growth of the Internet offers use the opportunity to find information and data from all over the world. Internet resources, in particular World Wide Web resources, continue to proliferate at an astonishing rate. This is especially true for commercial web sites which as some experts state, grow at an astonishing rate of one per every 3 seconds!

Keywords: e-business, website design, website evaluation criteria

1.INTRODUCTION

To successfully create the (commercial) presence on the web, it is necessary to be aware of the users – customers.

The internet works both ways - It is possible for almost anyone to place anything on the Internet. Viral marketing can, with lightning speed, spread the word about your product, be it good or bad.

Users appreciate quality and credibility.

Users are security sensitive, and especially so when they want to purchase over the internet.

Users look for some fixed points or anchors to lead them through the content of the page.

Users follow intuition when browsing; they do not like to follow a linear pattern provided by a site.

Users are impatient and insist on instant gratification.

Users should be motivated for them to revisit the website

To be able to effectively present the product to the customer you need to pursue the following principles of user psychology

Don't make users think , Don't squander users patience ,Manage to focus users attention , Strive for feature exposure , Make use of effective writing , Strive from simplicity , Don't be afraid of the white space , Communicate effectively with a visible language , Conventions are our friends , Security and privacy are of highest importance, the presence of the company's website on the internet must be known to the target audience.

2.MATERIAL AND METHODS

2.1 Criteria for Evaluation

Out of the many criteria we found the following to properly evaluate the content of the website.

2.1.1.Purpose

The website has to have a clear purpose. Whether it is an educational site, an internet multimedia presentation, search portal or commercial site different rules of design and organization apply.

2.1.2.Audience

Who is the implied audience for the site? From the homepage of a site, the user of the web should be able to identify the general audience for whom the site is developed.

2.1.3.Functionality

Functionality is the use of technology on the site. Good functionality means the site works well. It loads quickly, has live links, and any new technology used is functional and relevant for the intended audience. The site should work cross-platform and be browser independent. Highly functional sites anticipate the diversity of user requirements from file size, to file format and download speed. The most functional sites also take into consideration those with special access needs.

2.1.4.Organizational

Is the organizational scheme appropriate, A Web document that has a vast tree of links is difficult to navigate and overwhelming to the eye. Is there a consistent look and feel from one page to another? - Visual similarities in all sections.

Navigation

Navigation through the website should be an effortless process. Transferring from one part of the website to another should be an intuitive process and the user should not be. The website has to have clear anchor points around which the web site is structured.

2.1.5.Accessibility

The website should allow easy access to the products it is trying to sell, and use other resources like search engines or web apps to promote this goal.

2.1.6.Uniqueness

Uniqueness and originality of the web site is not mandatory but can help to attract visitors and promote a different image of the company in the industry. However commercial sites are limited in their creativity because the purpose of the site is not to be original but to best promote the product it is based for.

2.1.7.Design & Style

the general appeal of the website can be improved by its design it must never take second place to the functionality of the site itself. It must be taken into consideration what is the purpose of the graphical content on the web page, The visual image of the site should match accordingly so that the look and feel is similar while transitioning the page. Lastly but not least importantly the design of the web site should extend the company image and adhere to target audience.

2.1.8.Multimedia

Good web sites weave together relevant text, audio, video, and still images to give users a rich experience. Multimedia content has to be adjusted to be compatible with users with low bandwidth speeds and different browsers.

2.1.9.Security and Privacy

If your website collects sensitive information from your customers, you should use security systems like SSL (Secure Socket Layer). This guarantees that the data provided by your customer will not fall into the hand of a malicious hacker while transferring from his computer to the web server. If your site is planning to use cookies, make sure that you covered this aspect in your privacy policy too.

2.1.10Website

The website we chose to evaluate is a site held by the company HORSEFEATHERS™ and can

be found on the internet address www.horsefeathers.eu



HORSEFEATHERS™ was originally founded in 1989 in British Columbia, Canada as a brand who started selling specific sports apparel or so called “outerwear”, intended for snowboarders and skateboarders.

The website was launched in 2001 and it follows the industry standard in that it is completely revamped twice a year to reflect the winter and summer seasons (snowboard and skateboard).

3.DISCUSSION

To evaluate this site we will view through each of the criteria defined in the previous part .

Purpose

Purpose of any commercial website which sells finite products is to act as an interactive shop window . The site offers other information like NEWS, BLOG and even INTERVIEW and VIDEO archive but the main part of the page is dedicated to showcase its products.

3.1.Audience

It is clear from the start that the site is oriented towards the younger generation. With its stylized graphics and action shots it appeals to the specific nature of the sports it represents. Interviews and blogs are conducted with young up-coming stars in their respectable sports, and as such appeal to the population who view these activities as more than just a hobby. To them these people are their role models and a connection to the brand is a great marketing strategy.

3.2.Functionality

The content of the site is well balanced, the graphics are of high quality but not such that can severely hamper the users with slower internet connection. The multimedia content provided can be viewed in different resolutions which a customer can choose, and the only requirement for the site to be seen is to have Adobe flash installed , which is pretty much the industry standard. The web page looks identical in Firefox, Explorer and Chrome, three predominant internet browsers

3.3.Organization& Navigation

The organizational units that compose the site are available from the first page of the web site and remain available when navigating through it. It is commendable that the site decided to abandon the idea of pop-ups upon entry and language selection page at the beginning. We believe that these components detract from experiencing the website. The organization is roughly divided in three parts the top layer that contains the links to every part of the web site, the middle window where the majority of the content is displayed and the bottom layer which gives additional links and information. The whole promotional part of the website is done flawlessly because each part of the website is accessible from no more than 3 clicks, The shopping part is done with a bit less finesse, the simple and clean promotional page is left and is replaced with a clunky interface where all the product are piled up In endless columns. This leaves the user at question because suddenly the access to the rest of the content is cut off, category links have switched places and the user is once again doomed to make use of a scroll bar. This whole switch would be easy to forget if the access to content made up for it but in contrast it even becomes difficult to seek the product you need. But this is a topic for accessibility of content.

3.4.Accessibility

The promotional part of the website is exemplary in its access to content. Already mentioned in organizational part the product are clicks away to access and make browsing through them a fun experience. By clicking on the desired piece of clothing it is automatically shown on the model. It is a great system and since in these kind of sports apparel is basically bought to complement the kind of gear you already possess (the color of the board, boots and bindings for example) this becomes a necessity.

3.5.Uniqueness

In terms of uniqueness the page is not entirely different from its rivals (One could even argue that they are more similar than different f.e. www.nitrousa.com, www.burton.com) but that is not necessarily a weakness. The products are the centerpiece of the pages and everything else supports that idea.

3.6.Design & Style

It is immediate from the first view of the page that the site has a crisp youthful design. The predominant color is white with brightly colored links and fitting graphic. The idea of product based sites most times is for the web page to blend into the background while the product is put in front and the character of products (bright unnatural colors on white background – snow) creates a perfect setting for that effect. The graphic images are presented with a stylish pencil drawn background and the configuration option I presented with mechanical sounds and futuristic letters which improves the experience. The shopping part of the page is presented in a style that neither improves nor hampers the shopping.

3.7.Multimedia

The web page is modest in its multimedia content and that Is not a bad thing. The interviews and rider videos are easily accessible but not forced onto customers. The videos use a third party video repository Video similar to YouTube but a favorite among fans of extreme sports. The configuration part of the page was done using Adobe Flash technology

Security and privacy

Shopping on the web page can be done in three ways (via Credit Card , via PayPal , via Bank transfer)These steps satisfy the needs of most customers who desire to purchase over the web. Using credit card is the easiest way but carries the risk of online transactions present everywhere on the internet. The shopping is done on a secure html page as per industry standard. PayPal is more secure in that way that the credit card info is inserted sometime before and the customer is just using his PayPal account. This method requires an active PayPal account however. The last option is direct bank transfer which is the most cumbersome but most reliable way and it does not require a credit card. The shipping is free to all users who order a total sum of over 300 Euros.

4.CONCLUSION

the web page is a good concept, it has a lot of room for improvement, and with proper improvement the web page with its Configuration could become a big success. Improvements could be made in shopping section, which needs to be redesigned to match, other sections of this web page and it needs to be simpler and easier for common usage. Aside to this, their web catalog needs to be redesigned and reorganized to meet modern shopping standards. The entire web page logic needs to be revised; additional features need to be included into Configuration section which would make shopping easier and more efficient. The web page has a lot of potential, and with proper improvements it could become a big hit and it could bring a lot of money to shop owner.

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